



by Brian Gomez

FM Rock Radio ... it's beginning to rival politics and religion as a subject sure to spark controversy. In the past few years, SCENE has printed a variety of commentary on the subject.

While all this arguing has been going on, a viable alternative has quietly arisen. It programs the wide variety of music that many people have been crying for. But still the complaining continues. Perhaps the complainers are not fully aware of non-commercial college radio. Where else can you hear a Little Anthony & The Imperials record played in between songs by Magazine and Modern Eon? College radio seems as complete an alternative as you'll ever get.

Mark Edwards, WCSB Music Director, summarized the feelings which initially prompted me to consider writing this article. His comments are right to the point.

"There have been an awful lot of people complaining about what's played on FM radio these days," he states. "People writing to SCENE and people not buying albums anymore ... I can't understand why they don't seriously consider listening to college radio instead of complaining. They can't really expect commercial FM radio to play very many new and different things. That's what we're here for."

College radio stations can air a wide range of things because they are non-commercial. That means they are not allowed to air commercials. They are each financed by the college that owns them.

Murray Saul hit the nail on the head when he cited the need to play the hits to attract a big audience. (SCENE, Feb. 18) A big audience attracts advertisers willing to pay over \$100 each time they run a 30-second commercial in this market.

It's appalling to hear people bitching about radio stations becoming profitable money-makers. No one should ever have to feel ashamed about making an honest dollar, especially under a difficult economic climate which is threatening to turn all consumers into government cheese-eaters. Radio wants success just like any other business.

But college radio stations are non-profit by law, so they can serve a fraction of the community. Northeast Ohio is blessed with seven college stations. Oberlin College's WOBC (91.5), Baldwin-Wallace's WBWC (88.3) and Akron University's WAUP (88.1) can each be heard in parts of this area. Kent State's WKSU (89.7) can be heard throughout much of Greater Cleveland. However it has several paid professionals to run the station, thus eliminating it from further discussion here.

Cleveland State's WCSB (89.3), Case Western Reserve's WRUW (91.1) and John Carroll's WUJC (88.7) can be heard throughout Cuyahoga County and much of Lake County. The people who work without pay (every one of them) at these stations can tell the college radio story best.

Rich Barton arrives at WCSB early to prepare for his Tuesday night (10 p.m. to 1 a.m.) jazz program. He's also there just to chum around. Barton's been involved with WCSB for six and one-half years, so he's had the chance to make a few friends. This a good opportunity to question a guy the Program Director Ray Paulett calls the station's "guiding light."

"I've been involved here since the days when we broadcast only to our 'captive audience,' through the closed circuit to buildings on campus," Barton begins. "That would be since September of '75. We weren't officially 'on the air' until 1976, in May. I remember an invitation sent to Gerald Ford to join us for our first on-air broadcast. Of course he didn't show up. But we have a letter hanging here from one of his underlings thanking us for the invitation, and sending the President's 'deepest regrets.' We were shooting for high things back then," he chuckles.

Now a CSU graduate, Barton has been involved in many improvements at WCSB's relatively modern facility. He still enjoys the station, and is grateful for the support of the university administrators.

"We've been fortunate with the amount of space that was allocated to the station," he comments. "It's been a gradual evolution, we didn't get everything at once. The university put a lot of trust in us, and I don't think we've let them down."

"Our listeners are people who are just tired of hearing the same old sounds repeated over and over again elsewhere. Many callers say that they like what they're hearing, but don't know what to request because they don't know any of it yet. They just tell me 'play something good.'"

— Mark Edwards, WCSB

Mark Edwards is usily looking through the "push box" of new releases. He's compiling WCSB's list of most played records for the month of February.

Upon finishing, he shows me the list. Soft Cell is the most played (the whole LP, not just one song). Others in the top ten include Green On Red, Saxon and the Waitresses. It's not your usual FM radio playlist.

Edwards became Music Director in January, taking over for the graduated Cindy Tausch. He's one of the most dedicated record-buyers you'll ever meet. Many records played on WCSB were donated to the station by Edwards. He's already plunged full-speed into his MD duties.

"I've been writing to a lot of independent labels for new records. The five major label groups are most consistent in sending us things, so I don't have to contact them much," remarks Edwards. **"What I'm looking for are things that are different from the norm. I'll be more likely to play an album that won't get airplay on commercial stations, just for that fact. Because we are non-commercial, we should be playing things that don't get played elsewhere. If anyone has an album they'd like to send us, we'll consider playing it."**

Besides being MD, Edwards hosts a show each Saturday night from 10 p.m. 'till 3 a.m. It is a constant parade of things you've never heard before.

"A lot of the British modern music is becoming more accepted," Edwards explains. "I don't have to play Heaven 17 or Depeche Mode anymore, because other people at the station do. So now I have some room to go into other directions."

What kind of listeners would dare to follow in these new directions?

"Our listeners are people who are just tired of hearing the same old sounds repeated over and over again elsewhere," he states. "Many callers say that they like what they're hearing, but don't know what to request because they don't know any of it yet. They just tell me 'play something good.'"

"Lately I've been playing many of the new American bands," he continues. "And they're not only from the media centers of New York and L.A. either. Bands like Sport Of Kings from Chicago, Get Smart! from Kansas and Pell Mell from Oregon are good new bands that people can enjoy if they get the opportunities to hear them."

Ray Paulett strolls in to do some paper work in the office. As WCSB Program Director, he decides who will get on the air. While rustling through his papers, he points out that WCSB programs more than just new rock music.

"Wednesday programming offers the best example of our diversity," he says. "We have something different throughout the day — rock, public affairs, classical, Broadway music, jazz, the Hungarian Hour ..."

"We could just as easily run the ethnic shows at 2 a.m.," he states. "But we run them during the dinner hour because that's a good time to serve the ethnic audience."

Another facet of being station PD is interviewing and selecting new volunteers for the staff. "Each quarter, between 60 and 100 people apply to me about working at

the station," Paulett remarks. "About three to five of them eventually get accepted. We're looking for reliable people who care about the station, and not just themselves."

Across the hall in the production studio, Martin Hess is helping new staffer Bob Hisnay to produce an "Intown Sound" show (which features local musicians each Friday at 9 p.m. Meanwhile in the air studio, Brian James is busy maneuvering records, carts and written copy.

He often pauses to answer the request line. Looking at the request sheet, we see bands like Flock Of Seagulls and Our Daughter's Wedding. James mixes in some Sixties rock like the Choir along with the modern music requests. After his Tuesday night shift ends at 10 p.m., he has a chance to talk. He is WCSB's General Manager, which means he must concentrate on things like the budget and F.C.C. rules.

"Last year some of us went to a college radio conference in Chicago," he observes, **"and it was surprising how much more organized the college stations in this market are than elsewhere. Most of the stations didn't seem to have much in the way of defined responsibilities or procedures."**

Besides being an avid supporter of all area college stations, James also believes strongly in playing local music.

"I'll sometimes play entire sets of local music," he says, "because it's not covered too well on the commercial stations. They only play one new local band right now — the Generators, and that's about it. A great song like "Into My Arms" by Lucky Pierre goes unnoticed as a result."

Airplay for local music has found acceptance with WCSB's relatively small audience. That's good news for listeners and bands alike.

There's a small sign on the first shelf in WRUW's voluminous record library. It reads "Be A Leader, Play Something New."

WRUW Program Director John Fry is in early for his Wednesday "Rock Block" program (on from 5 to 7 p.m.). He's in "Studio A" with the headphones on, listening to a new LP by a band called Cosmic Overdose. Fry is brushing up on new releases to play for listeners.

"If it exists, we probably play it," he says. "That's our main thrust, along with public affairs and educational programming."

Fry has a good grip on his station's role in the community. "Economically, I can see where it'd be tough to do a great many different programs on a commercial station," he observes. **"Alternative things are alternative because they don't have a big audience... you don't have the same songs pounded into your head."**

"I just do this because it's fun," he says. "There's nothing really profound about the way I look at it. You find that the people who come down here thinking they're Steve Dahl or Kid Leo, well they just don't last very long. It's not very glamorous here."

WRUW Music Director Wade Tolleson arrives at the station at 5:30, straight from work. Tolleson is a non-student volunteer with the station, one of many who volunteer. People like Tolleson, Bill Anderson, Michigan Mom, Jim Szabo, and Dave, Dan, and Jimmie Wilson are WRUW's "guiding lights." Tolleson recalls his first exposure to the station in 1976.

"I happened to be listening to the radio one Saturday night and I tuned down to the left end of the dial," he says. "I heard this show that just blew my mind away. Songs of all kinds and comedy coming together with a flow to it. I just became entranced."

Soon afterward he volunteered to help out at the station, within a year becoming Music Director, a position he's held for about five years. He exudes a refreshing attitude about music.

"There is such an interconnection of things in all styles of music," he explains. "You can get a better understanding of rock by listening to the blues, the R & B, some jazz ... it's all one continuum." Tolleson hosts a fine example of musical inter-relationship, a show aptly called "Diversified, Inc." on Saturday mornings from 6 to 10:30.

He emphasizes one point which many people seem to miss. "A lot of bands today are drawing their inspiration and ideas from the '60s rock music," he says. "It's all kind of a recycling, but each time it's recycled there's another dimension added."

WRUW offers all kinds of music — rock, classical, bluegrass, jazz, you name it. A helpful aid in their constant quest for the latest rock records has been the Rockpool service, which distributes many new rock records.

"I had contact with one of the people involved in forming Rockpool, from a previous job he held," Tolleson says. "Since they knew what our station was trying to do, they let us get into it. They've been very encouraging to us."

"If we tried to compete with those commercial stations...well, they're professional and they've got the better equipment, so they're going to blow us into the lake."

— John Roddy, WUJC

Rockpool is a record distribution service based in New York. Many British labels send records to Rockpool, which in turn sends them to selected college radio stations across the country. They also distribute some records from both large and small American labels.

Taking a look at the latest Rockpool newsletter shows how far ahead of commercial stations the Rockpool stations are in giving bands airplay. While most commercial stations have been playing the Go-Go's for about 18 weeks, that band has been in the Rockpool top 30 charts for 34 weeks.

Both WRUW and WCSB are now Rockpool member stations. Rockpool is just one example of the many businesses which have sprung up due to college radio's viability as an alternative marketing channel. There are so many of them that another article would be necessary to adequately explain them.

John Roddy is one of the few people left on campus. It's the weekend of spring break at John Carroll, and everyone's either gone on vacation or home to see Mom and Dad. Nevertheless, Roddy has his hands full answering the request line at WUJC. He's been deluged with request for old and new heavy metal, from Deep Purple to Gillan.

Between last May and this February, there were no heavy sounds from WUJC. In fact, there was no sound at all because the transmitter was broken. Roddy is eager to explain why.

"Certain modifications were made on the old transmitter years ago and they weren't properly logged,"

he explains. "When it broke down last May, the old schematics we had just didn't apply anymore. We had to have the whole thing rebuilt, and since we don't have a large budget, we couldn't afford to do everything at once."

As Personnel Director, Roddy trains everyone who wants to get on the air at WUJC. He also hosts a show Sunday mornings from 8 to Noon. On this Saturday, he's filling in for the vacationing Mitch Capka.

"We try to provide alternatives, and we are educational," he says, "so this is primarily a training ground for people who want to work in radio. We run 20 hours of contemporary music a week, from 8 a.m. till Noon weekdays. It's for the air people here sharpening their skills for a job in commercial radio. 'Contemporary' here is Top-40 like WMMS or M105 and so forth."

Current WUJC Program Director Steve Passwaiter already works weekend air shifts at WLYT. Former PD Judi Thompson now does news at WLYT. New WUJC trainee Cliff Cornelius is in the studio watching Roddy work when Larry Jaeger pops in an hour early to prepare for his 3 p.m. Southern rock show.

"I'm a communications major here," he explains, "so this background helps a lot. My musical interest is secondary, but I know that I've expanded my musical horizons since I've been here."

Since WUJC was off the air for awhile, they're now trying to catch up on some of the albums they didn't get. "We can't afford much in the way of imports here," offers Roddy. "Ken Taylor though does deal a lot with the new English scene."

Taylor (on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to Midnight), Music Director Chas Williams (Sundays from 9 p.m. to Midnight) and "Doc" (Thursdays and Fridays, 10 p.m. to Midnight) bring in many of their own import albums to play.

"There's some reggae from 'J.R.', and Mitch Capka must be one of the leading authorities on 1960s garage rock-punk," states Roddy. "He brings in armloads of stuff."

"We tend to fill a gap here with college radio," offers Jaeger. "If you want to hear Michael Stanley, which is fine in its own place, you're better off listening to WMMS."

Roddy is quick to add his commentary. "If we tried to compete with those commercial stations," he says, "well, they're professional and they've got the better equipment, so they're going to blow us into the lake."

Jaeger adds one other pertinent comment. "I've found that you can build a following," he says. "I thought that hardly anyone would listen to this when I first started, but more and more they are listening."